

ALLUSION

an *indirect* reference to a historical or literary figure, event, or object—one that impacts meaning by the association or comparison established

PYGMALION, the facts

- a mythological sculptor who spurned the love of all women and instead created a statue of the ideal woman
- offended by his actions, Aphrodite, the goddess of love, punishes him by causing him to fall in love with his cold, lifeless creation
- after Pygmalion prays at her temple, Aphrodite feels pity and transforms the sculpture into a living woman, Galatea



Pygmalion and Galatea
1890

Jean-Léon Gérôme
French painter

PYGMALION, the implications of the allusion

- one who creates or remakes another person by teaching skills or accomplishments and then falls in love with his or her protégé
- a warning against single-minded pursuit of an ideal: obsession can lead to caring only for cold and lifeless perfection

from “The New Pygmalion or the Statue’s Choice”
Andrew Lang (1911)

O maiden, in mine image made!
O grace that shouldst endure!
While temples fall, and empires fade,
Immaculately pure:
Exchange this endless life of art
For beauty that must die,
And blossom with a beating heart
Into mortality!
Change, golden tresses of her hair,
To gold that turns to gray;
Change, silent lips, forever fair,
To lips that have their day!
Oh, perfect arms, grow soft with life,
Wax warm, ere cold ye wane;
Wake, woman’s heart, from peace to strife,
To love, to joy, to pain!

Galatea Before the Mirror

Claribel Alegría (1993)

my perfection isn't mine
you invented it

I am only the mirror
in which you preen yourself
and for that very reason
I despise you.

Galatea Again

Genevieve Taggard (1929)

Let me be marble, marble once again:
Go from me slowly, like an ebbing pain,
Great mortal feuds of moving flesh and blood:
This mouth so bruised, serene again,--and set
In its old passive changelessness, the rude
Wild crying face, the frantic eyes--forget
The little human shuddering interlude.

And if you follow and confront me there,
O Sons of Men, though you cry out and groan
And plead with me to take you for my own
And clutch my dress as a child, I shall not care,

But only turn on you a marble stare
And stun you with the quiet gaze of stone.